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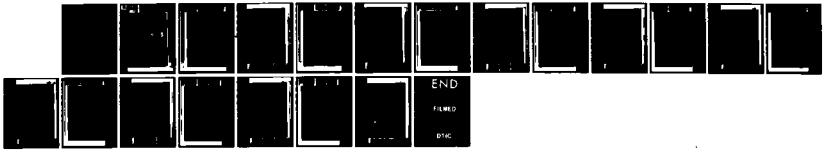

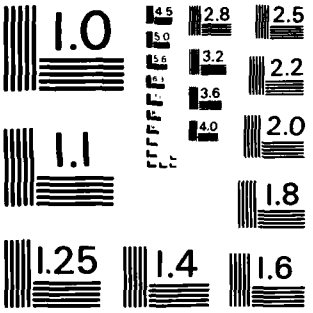

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THE LANGUAGE OF ORGANIZATIONS:
THE CASE OF THE NAVY

Roger Evered 1980

It is probably safe to assume that most people of working age have had the experience (at least once) of joining a new organization, especially a different kind of organization from those they have previously encountered. The initial experience is often described as confusing, scary, surprising, unintelligible, giving rise to a need to comprehend the new and unfamiliar surroundings in order to act (Louis, 1980). New situations characterized by unfamiliar organizational terminology, data, signals and symbols are difficult to make sense of because the critical vocabulary, relational rules and translational codes are not initially known. In short, organizational events and actions have no meaning until we learn the *language* of the particular organization that provides the context for meaning.

Presumably then, every organization has its own characteristic language system(s). Organizations typically provide orientation sessions, apprenticeships, and training programs for newcomers in order to instruct the newcomer in the *language of the organization* — the unique terminologies, codes, acronyms, and sign systems, as well as the symbols and

metaphors that convey the culture of the particular organization. The larger the organization, especially those which are highly differentiated and more technologically based, the more language there will be to convey, and the more extensive will be its training programs to teach newcomers the new organizational language.

The U.S. Navy offers a particularly fine example of a very large, complex and technologically sophisticated organization. It also has a massive training function with a total annual budget of approximately $3 billion, which might lead us to postulate that the Navy is a language-rich organization and worthy of study. The language used by the members of any organizational group not only characterizes that group but reveals how its members view their organizational world and how their world is construed. In short, *the language they use defines their reality.*

What follows is an exploration of characterizing language systems of one particular organization, the U.S. Navy. The underlying premise is that the distinctive real world of the Navy is defined most fully by the language systems used by its members. "Language" is here used in the broader sense, and defined as *any structured system of codifiable symbols by means of which a particular group of people communicate meaning and regulate their activities.* Of particular relevance here are the symbols, signs, and words that most Navy folk view as commonplace, and that most non-Navy folk view as largely unintelligible.

There are, or course, many other ways of defining the reality of an organization like the Navy, depending on what is meant by reality. We might, for example, define the Navy by the tangible property for which the Navy is responsible—the ships, shore facilities, buildings, etc., which may be specified with considerable precision. Alternatively, we could map out and specify the existing organization of the Navy in terms of its offices, roles, activities, tasks, reporting responsibilities, authority structures, etc. Or, we might take a more functional approach toward defining the Navy and proceed to specify the mission, purpose and function of the Navy in terms of the larger societal purposes and environmental forces.

What I want to do here, however, is to adopt an approach toward defining reality akin to that of the symbolic interactionists. From this perspective social reality is defined by the language used by the members of the social system. Language does more than communicate information and more than enable the members to make sense. Language *creates* the reality, it has been argued. The "organization" has no objective reality (in a positivistic sense), but rather *is created daily by the linguistic enactments of its members in the course of their everyday communications between each other;* that is, by the way in which its members talk, hold discourse,

share meanings. The particular language of an organization has embedded within it a categorization and structuring of a world which externalizes itself by being used. The existence of a common language implies an intersubjectivity of the inherent world view. The sense of objectivity is, in truth, achieved by this linguistic intersubjectivity.

The view that language plays the critical role in the construction of the social (and hence organizational) world has been articulated by a number of writers: the socio-linguists, Sapir (1949), Whorf (1964) and Bernstein (1974); the sociologists Mead (1943), Schutz (1973), Blumer (1969), Berger and Luckmann (1966); and the philosophers, Wittgenstein (1922), Habermas (1979) and Gadamer (1975). Until quite recently, few organizational studies have been undertaken based upon this orientation.

THE NAVY

Scope and Complexity

Before exploring the linguistics of the Navy, it is necessary to outline the overall scale, organization and function of the U.S. Navy.

At the present time, (1979) the Navy has a payroll of 1,020,000 persons, including 720 thousand military; (550,000 on active duty). The Navy procures and globally operates (on a 24-hour day basis) extremely complex equipment in three media: (a) *on* the ocean surface (470 ships including 13 massive aircraft carriers), (b) *under* the ocean surface (120 submarines; 110 of which are nuclear powered, and 40 of which carry ballistic missiles), and (c) *above* the ocean surface (approximately 6000 aircraft and satellites of diverse functions). One of the Navy ships (the USS Nimitz) is a nuclear powered aircraft carrier carrying a crew of 6300 men and having a displacement of 91,400 tons—the world's largest warship. Necessarily the hardware procureme[illegible]stic support for supplies, materials and equipment, training and [illegible]re on a colossal scale. The Navy's budget is currently $55 billion.

The technological sophistication of the Navy in a number of areas is equally impressive. In ship design, avionics, navigation, weaponry, telecommunications, intelligence, oceanography, inventory control, and a number of other fields, the Navy's technology is as advanced as any in existence. This implies that the specialized languages of these forefront technologies are part of the language of the Navy organization.

The organization of the U.S. Navy is extremely complex and therefore difficult to convey concisely without trivializing its richness. What

follows is merely a quick sketch to aid the reader in appreciating the linguistic theme of this paper.

Since 1947 the Navy has been part of the Defense Department, along with the Army and the Air Force; the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD); the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS); the various unified commands (composed of components of two or more services, such as the U.S. European Command); and the various specified commands, such as the Military Sealift Command (MSC).

The Department of the Navy (DON) is headed by the Secretary of the Navy (SECNAV), a civilian. The senior naval officer in the Department of the Navy is the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO), who manages the operating forces (such as the U.S. Pacific Fleet, whose commander-in-chief is known as CINCPACFLT). He is also responsible for the vast Naval Material Command (NMC) which supplies the material needed by the operating forces.

The Department of the Navy is thus composed of:

1. The "Navy Department" (the central executive authority of the Navy in Washington),
2. The "Shore Establishment" (such as the 5 "systems commands"),
3. The "Operating Forces" (the "fleet" per se).

Interfaces between the Navy and other organizations (such as the Marine Corps, the Coast Guard, and the allied Navies) generate further organizational complexity.

The complexity of the Navy is also reflected in the statements of mission, effectiveness and capability. As stated in Title 10, U.S. Code, the mission of the Navy is to be prepared for prompt, effective, and sustained combat operations at sea, to help defend against all enemies in time of war, and to support the National foreign policy in peacetime. The Navy has three main roles within the national strategy: (1) strategic deterrence, (2) deployment of overseas forces, and (3) security of the sea lines of communication with U.S. overseas interests.

Measures of effectiveness for the Navy are very difficult to specify, especially under peacetime and crisis conditions. Only under wartime conditions does an effectiveness level become at all clear. Since Secretary of Defense McNamara, it has become popular to assess military effectiveness in terms of the cost to achieve a level of confidence in the accomplishment of hypothetical missions. The capability of Naval forces is measured by such features as: force structure, state of modernization, readiness level and sustainability. The process of generating Navy ca-

pability requires careful assessment of three very elusive factors: strategy, threat, and risk.

The very great difficulties in specifying the purpose and effectiveness of the Navy results in increased attention to the professionalism, ceremonies, symbols, and traditions of the Navy—in short, *the Navy culture*. In the absence of a clear bottom-line measure of performance, greater attention must be given to Navy symbols that maintain the Navy's essential functions and identity, which is perhaps best indicated by the unique language of the Navy.

Data for this section were taken mainly from US, OMB, (1979); US, OFR, (1979); and US, CNO, (1979).

Communications Systems

Language involves a set of signs (vocabulary) and relational rules (grammar) as well as the means of discourse in these signs (communication systems). The Navy is richly endowed, both with its own sign conventions and its own means of discourse. (For a useful introduction to the study of language, see Pei, 1965, 1971).

Given the global dispersion of the Navy, the importance of command and control in the military, and the variety of specialized Navy languages, one might expect that some sophisticated systems of communication have been developed within the Navy. And such is the case. Systems for communicating the various Navy languages abound in great variety, many using extremely advanced technologies. I can think of no other organization that comes close in its variety or sophistication of communications systems.

All the familiar *verbal* modes are, of course, available—face to face, messengers, bulletin boards, public telephone, memos, intercoms, mail, "passing the word", etc. Additionally, the Navy uses a variety of *sound* systems: bells, buzzers, horns, gongs, sirens, whistles, etc., as well as a variety of *visual* systems: flag hoist, semaphore, flashing lights and pyrotechnics. The Navy uses these systems on a daily basis in ways that are highly specific to the Navy. It is also worth noting here that Navy aviators who served as POW's at the famous "Hanoi Hilton" in Vietnam, used a tap-code to communicate with each other when in solitary confinement (Butler, 1977).

A variety of radio, wire, and telegraph systems have also been developed in Navy-specific ways—including the CW system (radiotelegraph), the RT system (radiotelephone), the RATT system (radioteletype), and the FAX system (facsimile). A variety of codes (such as the Morse code)

and mandatory abbreviations, procedure words (pro-words), procedure signs (pro-signs), and ciphers are used—again in Navy-specific ways.

The telecommunications world of the Navy is one of great complexity, both technologically and organizationally. The Navy uses the various private transmission networks developed by the Defense Communications Agency (DCA)—AUTOVON (voice telephone), AUTODIN (digital), AUTOSEVOCOM (secure voice), DSCS (Defense Satellite Communications System), etc., etc. Additionally, the Navy has a large number of its own private networks, most notably the FLTSATCOM (Fleet Satellite Communication), the HF, VLF, and MF networks and the sophisticated NAVCOMPARS (Navy Communication Processing and Routing System) (see Dunn, 1980).

JOINING THE NAVY

Ranks and Ratings

Consider briefly a new recruit's encounter with the U.S. Navy as he (she) walks into a blizzard of new language. He enlists at the AFEES (Armed Forces Examining and Entrance Station), otherwise known as his home town recruiting station. He then goes to a RTC (Recruit Training Command) at the nearest NTC (Naval Training Center). "The RTC puts you through the transition from civilian to military life with a very busy schedule of lectures and drills on the Navy's history, traditions, customs and regulations" (Wedertz, 1978, p. 64). Here he learns the first key words in his new (i.e., Navy) vocabulary, such as the CC (Company Commander), the POD (Plan of the Day), BI (Barracks Inspection), EPO (Educational Petty Officer), MD (Military Drill), TOD (Term of the Day), TAD (Temporary Additional Duty), etc.

The newly enlisted recruit is given three tests: the ASVAB (Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery), the NFQT (Nuclear Field Qualifications Test) and the FLAT (Foriegn Language Aptitude Test). The recruit is also given a four digit NEC code (Navy Enlisted Classification) which codifies the recruit's incoming skills, qualifications, and aptitudes. For example, a 3221 would be a Navy Broadcast Journalist.

As a result of the recruit training program, the recruit is assigned an occupational classification called a *rating*. There are some eleven broad occupational groups with a total of seventy different ratings, each identified by two letters. Group III, for example, is Electronics, comprised of the two ratings "Electronics Technician" (ET), and "Data Systems Technician" (DS). Our recruit also learns that each occupational rating has a common nickname that only Navy folk know: A Radioman (RM) is

known as *sparks*, a Signalman (SM) is a *skivvy waver*, a Communications Technician (CT) is a *spook*, and so forth. He also finds out that the CT rating was recently changed; it now stands for cryptographic technician.

Every organization has its own payscale system which defines much of the organizational reality of the organization so specified. In the Navy there are paygrades for the enlisted ranks (i.e., *white hats*) designated E–1 through E–9. Men with grades E–1 through E–3 are called Strikers; E–4 through E–9 are called Petty Officers. There are Warrant Officers, designated W–1 through W–4, and Commissioned Officers, designated O–1 through O–6, and beyond to the various types of Admiral. Enlisted men who eventually become commissioned officers are known as *mustangs*, as every Navy man knows.

This classification system for rank and rating level has been further codified in the various badges, markings and insignia worn on the uniforms. The rating, rate, special qualifications, length of service, and good-conduct records of enlisted men and women are indicated by their sleeve and breast insignia. Additionally, there are over 150 possible awards that may be worn as decoration "ribbons" each signifying something about the wearer. A grade level system combines rank, pay, age, occupational ratings and experience history into career assignment patterns. The mention of E-8, W-2, O-5, or GS-13 (for civilian grades) conveys a whole universe of meaning to a Navy person, but very little to a non-Navy person.

There is, of course, much more to ratings, ranks, uniforms, and insignia than discussed here. The point, however, is this: there is a highly developed *language* of ratings/ranks/uniforms/insignia; it is *communicated* constantly as a natural part of the daily discourse, and it is systematically *learned* by the new recruit. As the *Blue Jackets' Manual* says, "The matter of ranks, rates and insignia will seem confusing at first, but once you learn the system you'll find it fairly simple. First, learn all the officers' rank marks and insignia, the rating badge chevrons that show the rate of enlisted personnel, the line insignia, and special identification marks" (Wedertz, 1978, p. 39). A Navy man recently said to me, "So much is communicated by the uniform and its markings that it's as if the man is wearing his resume—assuming, of course, that you're a Navy man." Non-Navy persons who do not know the language get very little information.

Rules and Regulations

To join an organization necessitates the learning of the *rules and regulations*, prescribed by and peculiar to that organization, that explicitly

set out to govern the actions, behaviors, choices, and decisions of its members. The newcomer is required to learn this new language and to exhibit conduct that is congruent with this language. Eventually the proper kind of conduct (congruent with the rules and regulations) becomes a language in itself that is "read" by the other members. Members whose conduct is too deviant from the prescribed code are, in effect, speaking a different language and will eventually become out-group. Members who want "in" must learn the language of proper conduct set down in the rules and regulations and exhibited daily by those whose behaviors conform to these rules and regulations.

The Navy is a world of extensive codification of objects, events, situations, and appropriate conduct. The manuals of official regulations and standardized procedures are extremely voluminous and seemingly cover every imaginable contingency. Some of the principal regulatory documents that govern the Navy person's world are the following:

1. *Navy Regulations* (NAVREGS)
2. *Bureau of Naval Personnel Manual* (BUPERSMAN)
3. *Uniform Code of Military Justice* (UCMJ)
4. *U.S. Navy Uniform Regulations*
5. *Navy Pay and Personnel Procedures Manual* (PAYPERSMAN)
6. *Manual of Advancement*
7. *Standard Organization and Regulations Manual* (SORM)

There are additional manuals for a wide range of activities. The two-volume *Joint Travel Regulations* (JTR), for example, deals with the governance of travel, including the transportation of HHG's (Household Goods).

In addition, a number of offices within the Navy Department issue extensive *directives* which prescribe or establish policy, organization, conduct methods or procedures. These directives are issued either as "instructions" (INST), or "notices" (NOTE), implying either permanent guidance or temporary advise. The four most prolific sources of command directives at DOD (Department of Defense), SECNAV (Secretary of the Navy), OPNAV (Office of the Chief of Naval Operations), and *Bureau of Naval Personnel* (BUPERS), (which recently changed to Naval Military Personnel Command, (MILPERS) as every Navy man knows). Directives covering a very wide range of topics are typically labeled as follows:

Standard Organization and Regulations of the U.S. Navy,	OPNAVINST 3120.32A
Standards of Conduct	SECNAVINST 5370.2F

Retirement Ceremony	BUPERSMAN, Art. 2810200
Disciplinary Control Boards	BUPERSINST 1620.4B

Memos and correspondence in the Navy are typically laden with references to directives such as the above, presumably to validate the authority of the message. There are, however, so many directives that cover such a wide range of topics that directives can be found (as with the Bible and the works of Shakespeare) to support a broad spectrum of decisions and actions.

The content of OPNAVINST 3120.32A (above) is of particular interest to both organizational scientists and to the theme of this paper. It specifies in the form of a fiat how the Navy is to be organized, administered, and regulated. Familiar concepts are given a distinctly Navy flavor.

A Navy man works in a particular regulatory environment that is unique to the Navy. The codification of his world is, to a large extent, contained in the regulations manuals and directives. In a Whorfian sense, the particular set of rules and regulations of a man's organization significantly influences the way he views his world (Whorf, 1964). Data in this section are taken mainly from Agerton and Mack (1976) and Wedertz (1978).

Character and Style

A newcomer to the Navy (whether as an enlisted man, a junior officer or a civilian in the Navy) soon comes to appreciate that there is a unique flavor to "Navy" that distinguishes it from all other organizations. The particular culture called "Navy" is steadily transmitted to the newcomer. What are the characteristics of this culture and how are they symbolically communicated? My purpose here is to illustrate the notion of culture transmission through symbols rather than to describe exhaustively the Navy culture.

Consider briefly the more obvious character of Navy. Navy officers commonly convey a well-mannered, alert, competent professionalism. There are also qualities of "responsiveness to authority", "being ready", "can do", and "not fazed by sudden contingencies".

There are at least three ways that such values are transmitted.

*1. **Training programs.*** The desired qualities can be explicitly articulated and rewarded. For example, in *Naval Orientation* (a book "prepared mainly for use in officer training programs") we read the following:

> The terms 'officer' and 'gentleman' are synonymous. Some of the requisite traits of the true officer are integrity, loyalty, dependability, regard for the rights of others, tolerance, self-confidence, sense of humor, ability to treat all men as equals,

tact, and good manners. A careful study of the above characteristics will prove that these also are the traits of the genuine gentleman (US, BNP, 1970).

2. ***Ceremonies.*** The Navy has an abundance of customs and ceremonies by means of which the crucial values are actualized. They range from a hand salute to flag etiquette, boat etiquette, shipboard customs, gun salutes and passing honors, etc. (Lovette, 1959). Consider these two examples: a) The procedure for entering boats is—senior in last and out first (businessmen would call it a LIFO system). "The idea is that the captain should not have to wait in a boat for anyone. The senior gets out first because normally business is more important and pressing than that of the men under him" (Wedertz, 1978, p. 87). b) When a Vice-Admiral pays an official visit he is accorded the following honors—dress uniform, "Admiral's March" music, full guard, 17 gun salute on arrival, 15 on leaving, 3 ruffles and flourishes, 8 side boys. In contrast, a Rear Admiral is accorded—dress uniform, "Admiral's March" music, full guard, 17 gun salute on arrival, but only 13 on leaving, only 2 ruffles and flourishes, and only 6 side boys!

Each of these two seemingly trivial examples is selected almost randomly from the vast language of ceremonies and customs with which a Navy man becomes familiar. Change of command ceremonies present another excellent example. In part, they constitute some of the perquisite system of the Navy, but more importantly, they serve to make tangible the values of a naval officer—well-mannered, respecting authority and discipline, being ready, etc.

3. ***Historical models.*** In few organizations is the sense of historical tradition so much a part of its present as it is in the Navy. A visit to any of the Navy centers (for example, the Naval Academy at Annapolis) is exposure to naval traditions and a heritage of key values. We are exposed to John Paul Jones ("In time of peace it is necessary to prepare, and be always prepared, for war at sea"); Captain Truxton ("Care for your men; see that each understands his duties; exact instant obedience; superintend everything; practice daily with the guns"); Captain Perry ("Don't give up the ship!"); Commodore Dewey ("You may fire when you are ready, Gridley"—at a range of 2-½ miles); Admiral Farragut ("Damn the torpedoes—full steam ahead!"), etc., etc. All part of the value language that is symbolically transmitted within the organization.

Let me elaborate on the process for clarity. Many of the famous events of naval history and the famous statements uttered at those events have been "captured" by Navy painters, and copies of these paintings are available for framing and hanging in appropriate places—offices, lobbies, etc. At the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, for example,

there is a small conference room in daily use. On the end wall is a beautiful, dramatic painting that captures the moment on May 4th, 1917, when the first U.S. destroyers met with the British fleet to join them in the war against Germany. The caption reads as follows:

> After a rough (transatlantic) passage, the first U.S. destroyer division, under Commander Joseph Taussig, reached Queenstown, Ireland, when America joined the Allies in World War I. When asked by the British Vice Admiral Sir Lewis Bayly how long it would be before the division would be ready to deploy an antisubmarine patrol, Taussig signaled, 'We are ready now.'

In these examples, history and art combine to transmit the critical language that conveys the valued qualities of Navy.

THE VOCABULARY OF SEAFARING

Craft Terms

Every craft, trade and technology generates its own vocabulary and specialized terminology. Those whose craft is concerned with the *se* have been particularly fertile in generating specialized vocabulary. Dictionaries and glossaries of sailing, nautical knowledge, navigation and marine terms abound. (See for example McEwen & Lewis, 1953; U.S. NOO, 1969; Noel & Beach, 1971; Bradford, 1972; Rousmaniere, 1976; Kemp, 1976; Vandenberghe, 1978). During the 8 years 1966 to 1974, no fewer than 77 dictionaries on the general naval sciences (maritime/navigation/Navy) have been published (Brewer, 1975).

These dictionaries of seafaring or maritime vocabularies seem to be comprised of several categories of words.

1. English words whose primary meaning is maritime. They range in general intelligibility from easy words (e.g., anchor, rudder) to difficult words (e.g., martingales, catharpings, starbowlines, mizzen-tuttock-shrouds, gilguys, royal stu'n's'ls, fore-topgallant-standing-backstay, etc.).
2. English words that have taken on a special meaning in a seafaring context (eg., port, take, gypsy).
3. Technology words that developed in the general naval sciences (e.g., sidereal hour angle, calculated zenith distance, Mohn effect).
4. Customs and sea lore (e.g., Davy Jones' locker, splicing the mainbrace).
5. Acronyms and abbreviations (e.g., DESFLOT, NAVFAC, C^3).
6. Signal letters (e.g., P, NC, MAA).

7. Slang (e.g., sandcrab = civilian worker in a Navy shipyard, jarhead = a marine).

The last three items—acronyms and abbreviations, signal letters, and slang—warrant further discussion in view of their distinctive use in the Navy.

It should be noted in passing, however, that some sea language has entered the common pool of everyday English (see Colcord, 1977). In most *non-Navy* organizations, for example, you are likely to hear a number of boating terms. When you join you will probably be "welcomed aboard". You will also hear managers talk about getting the project "under way", "taking a different tack", "keeping an even keel", and "seeing that everything is shipshape". You may be told that as long as you don't "make waves," or "go overboard," everything will be "smooth sailing." You will soon come to know which individuals in the organization are "fair weather friends", who "sails too close to the wind", and who "swings the lead". Your job is to see that the project doesn't "run aground". After work you may find yourself saying "down the hatch!" and then "going to the head"—hopefully when you are not "three sheets to the wind".

Paradoxically, when the language that characterizes an organization enters the common pool of everyday English, it no longer differentiates that organization.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

Even the most casual observer of the Navy cannot fail to notice the vast number of capitalized acronyms in common everyday use. It is often referred to as "alphabet soup".

Acronyms are, of course, not unique to the Navy. Acronyms were widely used by both the Greeks and the Romans. One example is the familiar SPQR (Senatus Populusque Romanus) standing for the "Senate and the People of Rome". World War II produced thousands of acronyms, such as ANZAC (Australian and New Zealand Army Corps), SEAC (South East Asia Command), DESFLOT (Destroyer Flotilla), and RADAR (Radio Detecting and Ranging). Government generally, and the military in particular, are acronym prone, for some reason.

There are by now a number of dictionaries of acronyms and military abbreviations which list abbreviations in common use and/or officially approved (see for example Crowley, 1976; and US, DOD, 1979) and the Navy has regularly published its "approved" list of abbreviations for use in official communications and messages.

Acronym dictionaries come in various forms. Many are Xerox copies of privately assembled abbreviations used by a particular organizational unit within the Navy. Some are privately published as books, such as DICNAVAB, WASH-MIC, and OCECODE (Wedertz, 1977; Honour & Kossan, 1973; and Aalberts, 1962, respectively), and some are official reports issued as directives, such as VS, JCS, 1979; US, DDC, 1977; and US, DDC, 1979.

The Navy (and most military organizations) uses acronyms extensively for organizational groups, for projects and for technological devices. Some of these acronyms may be recognized outside the Navy, such as DOD (Department of Defense), SECDEF (Secretary of Defense), and CNO (Chief of Naval Operations). Other acronyms are easily decipherable, such as NAVSUPSYSCOM (Navy Supply Systems Command), CHNAVPERS (Chief, Bureau of Naval Personnel), and CINCLANFLT (Commander in Chief, Atlantic Fleet). All organizational units within the Navy have official acronym designations. Thus, OP-10 signifies the Office of Military Manpower Planning and Programming Division of the Deputy Chief of Naval Operations (Manpower), and NMAT-08 designates the Office of the Deputy Chief of Naval Management for Acquisition at the Headquarters, Naval Material Command, and so forth.

The Navy also uses its own abbreviation language to designate all its hardware assets (see U.S., DOD, 1976). Every Navy ship and service craft is given a name and a letter designation that broadly classifies it as to function, major capability and specific use. Thus, the USS Enterprise is designated CVN-65. Similar, but more complex, designation systems are used for aircraft, missiles and equipment packages. A Navy man would immediately know that an aircraft designated YRF-4B is a prototype version of a Phantom-II fighter (the F-4) fitted with photo-reconnaisance. Likewise, he would immediately know that a missle designated as AIM-9E is an air-launched, intercept, guided missile, model 9, design E—also known as Sidewinder. And a piece of equipment labeled AN/APB-2D instantly indicates that its use is as follows: AN = electronics type, A = aircraft use, P = radar, B = bombing, 2 = model number, D = modification D, model 2. All very obvious to a Navy person—at least to persons in the "jet jockey" subcommunity of the Navy (i.e., Navy jet pilots).

Probably all fields now have their own particular acronyms: biochemistry has DNA and LSD, medicine has EKG and ENT, computer science has COBOL, APL, and PL1, government has DOD, HEW and HUD (which use GNP, CPI, and COLA) and business has IBM, BMW and NBC. And, at schools of management we teach OR, OB, OD, and MIS to BS, MBA or MS students (who have the proper SAT scores), and

we write articles for ASQ, JAP, and AMR. But surely no field has so many acronyms as the Navy has.

The International Code of Signals

The U.S. Navy shares with other navies and mariners an International Code of Signals that constitutes a language system in its own right (U.S. NOO, 1969). The Code enables communication in situations related essentially to safety of navigations and persons. It transcends problems associated with different spoken languages (English, French, etc.), and allows for several different methods of signaling.

The core of the Code is a vocabulary of letters and digits that stand for lengthier message phrases. The signals consist of

a) Single-letter signals allocated to messages that are very urgent, important, or of very common usage.
   Example: (i) F, code word "Foxtrot", signifies "I am disabled; communicate with me."

b) Two-letter signals for general signals.
   Example: (i) CJ signifies "Do you require assistance?"

c) Three-letter signals beginning with "M" for medical signals.
   Example: (i) MRL signifies "Commence artificial respiration immediately."

The meaning of these letter signals is amplified by the use of numerical complements. For example:

QG signifies 'You should go ahead.'
QG2 signifies 'You should go full speed ahead.'

Further conventions enable the signaling of such information as location, speed, distance, bearing, identity, etc. Thus, the signal "BH T1045 L2015N G3840W C125" would be seen by a Navy officer to say "I sighted an aircraft at local time 10:45 in latitude 20°15′ North, Longitude 38°40′ West flying on course 125°." Easy, when you know the language.

Moreover, such messages as these can be exchanged by flag hoist, by flashing light signaling, by Morse sound, by Morse radiotelegraphy, by semaphore, by radiotelephony or by voice over a loud hailer.

Of special importance to seafarers, are the twelve internationally accepted ways of signaling distress. Everyone in the Navy knows them, but

few outside the Navy would recognize more than the SOS and MAYDAY signals. The International Code Signal for distress is NC (November Charlie). Other accepted distress signals include a gun fired every minute, the continuous sounding with a fog horn, red rockets fired at regular intervals, an orange smoke signal, a red hand-flare, a square flag with a ball above or below it and the slow raising and lowering of outstretched arms (US, NOO, 1969, pp. 133–139). The language of distress is both well developed and familiar to Navy people.

Slang

All organizations develop their own informal lexicons that help characterize and give meaning to their particular circumstance (see Partridge, 1960; and Wentworth & Flexner, 1975). The slang, jargon and cant of a group provide the connective idioms that significantly define the group's reality and differentiate it from that of other groups.

In terms of slang the Navy is extremely rich. (See, for example, Granville, 1962). Terms range from the commonly used terms that are almost official (e.g., "fish" = torpedo) through the jocular and colloquial (e.g., "airdale" = aviator), to the unequivocally obscene (I'll refrain from an example here; any Navy man can tell you at least one). Slang terms help define the reality of an organization as much as the craft and technology terms do.

Slang words are highly differentiating as to group membership and organizational structure. There are literally thousands of slang words used in the Navy that have little meaning outside the Navy, such as "dirtbags", "two-wires", "blackshoes", "seals", and "group 9 personnel". The three primary communities in the Navy-surface, aviation and submariners—have each evolved their own slang terms within the Navy. Further slang inventions differentiate subgroups within these communities; thus, the nuclear submariners use a different slang from diesel submariners; the Navy supply people use different slang from the operating fleet people; and aircraft carrier language has evolved differently from destroyer language.

Slang terms also change rapidly. The lexicon expands, words transform, pronunciation shifts. Thus, an aviator is now commonly called an "airedale" in preference to the term "jet jockey" (to distinguish him from "prop pukes" and "rotor heads"). Earlier yet, an aviator was called a "zoomie," though this term is now more commonly used to refer to those who favor Admiral Zumwalt's style of leadership, particularly his famous "Z-grams."

In many ways slang is one of the major reality-setters in organizations. Hence slang-generating becomes a core reality-generating process. New slang words mark the specialness and belongingness of members. They provide the passwords and shibboleths that indicate who is "in" the group and who is "out". They provide the critical ingredient for acceptance and the exercise of social power, to counterbalance the legitimate power.

DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY

On the surface this is a paper about the Navy. More fundamentally, however, it is about *language and the role it plays in generating and maintaining organization.* I have explored some ways in which one particular organization (the U.S. Navy) uses language that is unique to that organization. There are words, symbols and modes of discourse that characterize this organization and which are unintelligible outside the organization.

The thesis is that every organization, task/activity and social group has its own language (lexicon, sign system, mode of discourse). The facts of linguistic differentiation are apparent, but the determinants of, reasons for, and functions of this fact remain obscure.

There are well over a million words in the English language, which includes about 100,000 slang words (Pei, 1966; Partridge, 1960; and Matthews, 1956). The average person who has been to college can recognize about 20,000 words (including about 2000 slang words), but uses only about 3000 words regularly. Several studies of spoken English (e.g., telephone conversations, etc.) indicate that 25% of the words in a conversation is comprised of only 9 words (a, and, I, it, etc.) and 50% of the words is comprised of only 43 words! (McKnight, 1923) As few as a thousand words constitute the common pool of words that make up 99% of our communication. Why then the discrepancy?

> The principal reason for this startling discrepancy between what we have at our disposal and what we know and use lies in the highly specialized vocabularies of the various and numerous branches of activity to which modern man devotes himself. As these forms of activity increase and multiply, so does the vocabulary. Each field finds it necessary to borrow, adapt, combine, coin, or otherwise create the nouns, adjectives, and verbs that describe its objects and concepts, its qualities, its forms of action (Pei, 1966, p. ix).

Every specialized activity forms a subcommunity for two reasons: a) because those engaged in an activity tend to communicate with each other more than with those in other activity fields, and b) because those

engaged in an activity tend to organize themselves into more cohesive units in the interests of efficiency, productivity, protection, etc. The language of many subcommunity activities have indeed been recorded (see, for example, Safire, 1968; Partridge, 1961).

In addition to task/activity reasons, specialized language is generated for social/behavioral reasons. Every group creates its own secret "in" words that differentiate that group from other groups. "In" language marks both belongingness to a group as well as the world view of the group. Words are markers of the class/caste/status/role of the members of the group. Perhaps more than anything else, it is this particularization of group language that differentiates and structures a social system.

The language used by the members of a particular organization characterizes that organization in terms of a) its similarities to and differences from other organizations, b) its societal role, and c) the world view and "reality" definition of its members. Language variations occur both *between* different organizations and *within* organizations, partly from task/activity reasons and partly from social/behavioral reasons.

One of the exciting corollaries of studying the relationship between organizations and language is the realization that *organizational change necessitates a language change*. Organizations only really change when there are concomitant changes in the words, symbols and metaphors of an organization. It also follows that organizational development consultants must give more attention to the reality-defining words, symbols and metaphors if they hope to facilitate any real organization change. Organizational linguistics offer a new research approach to the study of organizations. It is an approach that avoids the pitfalls of buying into positivistic assumptions—with all its attendant deficiencies. The study of organizational language offers a research approach that is both data-rich and grounded (i.e., experientially rooted) in the reality of the participants in organizational life.

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